

PROPOSED USE OF THE PLENARY POWERS TO PRESERVE THE
GENERIC NAME "TURBINELLA" LAMARCK, 1799, AS THE NAME
FOR THE SACRED CHANK SHELL OF INDIA

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The object of the present application is to ask the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature to use its Plenary Powers to preserve the well-known name *Turbinella* Lamarck, 1799 (*Mém. Soc. Hist. nat. Paris* 1799 : 73) as the name for the Sacred Chank Shell of India.

2. The name *Turbinella* Lamarck, of which the Chank Shell *Voluta pyrum* Linnaeus, 1767 (*Syst. Nat.* (ed. 12) 1(2) : 1195) is type species by monotypy, was in uninterrupted use for well over one hundred years. It only became invalidated in 1926 as the accidental by-product of the publication in that year of the Commission's *Opinion* 96, recognising as being available for nomenclatorial purposes the catalogue entitled *Museum Boltenianum* anonymously published in 1798. This unfortunate work, the acceptance of which by the Commission caused such widespread confusion and name-changing, contained the generic name *Xancus* Röding, 1798 (*Mus. bolten.* 2 : 134). The genus *Xancus* so established contained a number of species from which in 1906 (*J. Conch.* 11 : 296) Dall, in anticipation of the recognition of the availability of the *Museum Boltenianum*, had selected *Voluta pyrum* Linnaeus to be the type species of this genus. Thus, as matters now stand, the historic name *Turbinella* Lamarck is a junior objective synonym of *Xancus* Röding.

3. The names in the *Museum Boltenianum* were devised by Bolten but the "indications" which provide those names with the status of availability were supplied by Röding, to whom therefore these names should be attributed (see Hemming, 1955, *Bull. zool. Nomencl.* 11 : 56—57). In coining the name *Xancus*, Bolten no doubt deliberately Latinised the vernacular name "Chank" habitually applied to this species, by adding the termination "-us" and using a different initial letter. In this case the "x" is not the Latin letter which has the sound "ks" but the Greek letter Chi which has the same form and on being transliterated into Latin is normally written as "ch". Bolten's idea was quite ingenious but etymologically the name so formed is objectionable because it comes from roots of several languages, the name itself being of Cingalese origin, while the prefix is Greek and the suffix Latin.

4. The fact that purists will find the name objectionable is however the least important of the reasons for asking for it to be suppressed. The Chank Shell is found in the Eastern seas in the area where the Indian and Pacific Oceans come together. In this area there are important Chank Fisheries which are of direct interest to at least three Sovereign States. Each of these States has its own ordinances and regulations for governing these fisheries, and it is Lamarck's name *Turbinella* which is used in all of these.

5. In addition to the legal and commercial documents in which the name *Turbinella* habitually appears but in which the name *Xancus* is never found, there is a great mass of archaeological and ethnological literature relating to the religious and other uses of the Chank Shell. In Hindoo mythology the God Vishnu underwent several incarnations and in one of these he assumed the form of a Chank Shell in order that he might go under the waters of the ocean to recover the Vedas which had been stolen and hidden under the sea. In all the literature dealing with this group of subjects it is the name *Turbinella* which is used as the name for the Chank Shell and not the name *Xancus*. The Chank Shell is also of importance in Hindoo religion and medicine owing to the practice of the Hindoo priesthood in administering medicine from reversed (sinistral) specimens of the Chank Shell. These sinistral Chank Shells are considered too sacred for any other use and have in consequence entered widely into Hindoo folk lore. In this literature also it is the name *Turbinella* which has always been used for the Chank Shell.

6. The present is therefore pre-eminently one of those cases where long-established nomenclature ought not to be overturned in compliance with narrow technical requirements of a nomenclatorial kind. Such changes in names are open to strong objection, even when viewed from a strictly zoological angle, but these objections become insuperable when in addition to leading to the disappearance of some well-known zoological name (such as *Turbinella*), such changes lead to serious confusion in fields far removed from actual zoology. Indeed, it is such changes, when permitted in the past, which have done so much to discredit zoological nomenclature and zoologists generally.

7. For the reasons set forth above I accordingly ask that the Commission should validate the name *Turbinella* Lamarck by suppressing its senior objective synonym *Xancus* Röding, 1798. Even if these cogent reasons had not been present, I should still have considered necessary the action now recommended, for the name *Turbinella* was taken as the base for a family-name TURBINELLIDAE (Swainson, 1840, *Treatise Malac.* (Lardner's Cab. Cyclop.) : 75) well over a hundred years ago. I consider it important that this name should not be replaced by the virtually unknown name XANCIDAE Johnson, 1934 (*Proc. Boston Soc. nat. Hist.* 40(1) : 128).

8. The following are the proposals which are therefore now submitted to the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature, namely that it should :—

- (1) use its Plenary Powers to suppress the generic name *Xancus* Röding, 1798, for the purposes of the Law of Priority but not for those of the Law of Homonymy ;
- (2) place the under-mentioned name on the *Official List of Generic Names in Zoology* :—*Turbinella* Lamarck, 1799 (gender : feminine) (type species, by monotypy : *Voluta pyrum* Linnaeus, 1767) ;
- (3) place the under-mentioned name on the *Official List of Specific Names in Zoology* :—*pyrum* Linnaeus, 1767, as published in the combination *Voluta pyrum* (specific name of type species of *Turbinella* Lamarck, 1799) ;
- (4) place the under-mentioned name on the *Official Index of Rejected and Invalid Generic Names in Zoology* :—*Xancus* Röding, 1798, as suppressed under the Plenary Powers under (1) above ;
- (5) place the under-mentioned name on the *Official List of Family-Group Names in Zoology* :—TURBINELLIDAE Swainson, 1840 (type genus : *Turbinella* Lamarck, 1799) ;
- (6) place the under-mentioned name on the *Official Index of Rejected and Invalid Family-Group Names in Zoology* :—XANCIDAE Johnson, 1934 (type genus : *Xancus* Röding, 1798).